

SOFTWARE HELP

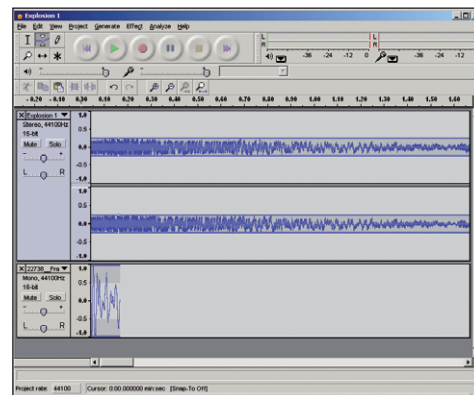
Explosion sound effect required

Q I've been charged with the task of creating an explosion sound effect for use in an amateur dramatics production. The explosion happens off-stage so we don't need any visual effects. I've tried a few sound effects that I found on the web, but no matter how good they sound through my PC speakers, they're all utterly unconvincing when tested in the theatre. What can I do to create a more realistic sound?

Ray

A Sound effects for film and TV are usually designed to give the maximum impact through cinema and TV speakers. Because speakers (and especially TV speakers) go only so loud, this usually means making explosions long and cacophonous to give the impression of being very loud. In real life, an explosion is a blast of air that manifests itself as an extremely loud, short bang, followed by the quieter sounds of ensuing carnage and turmoil. You'll need a speaker system that's capable of very high volume output to simulate this.

If you want to give it a go, download the free audio editor Audacity from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net> and import the best sound effect you've found so far. Next, you'll need to add a short, sharp, full-bodied bang. These are tricky to record (for the same reasons they're hard to reproduce), but kick drum samples used in music production are a suitably punchy alternative. You'll find a good example at <http://tinyurl.com/3639cb>. Download this WAV file and drop it into Audacity next to your existing sound effect. Delete any silence at the beginning of either sample to line them up – drag the mouse across the relevant sections of audio and press the Delete key. Select the Envelope



▲ All you need for a realistic explosion sound effect is a really big bang. Or a gun

Tool from the toolbox at the top-left and reduce the volume envelope of your original sound effect until the new sound dominates. For a truly wall-shaking explosion, return to the Selection Tool, highlight the new sound, click Effect, Change Speed, -50 per cent and click OK. Click File, Export As WAV... to save a stereo file that you can burn to CD.

When testing this sound, start quietly and turn the volume up slowly – this type of sound is quite effective at blowing up speakers. If your speakers aren't up to the job, consider using something that will make a very loud bang in the room – a large balloon or a starting pistol are two possibilities. You may even be able to combine this with one of your original sound effects on CD if you can get the timing right. However, you and anyone else in close proximity will probably need ear defenders to avoid damaging your ears. **BP**

Update query to correct capitalisation

Q We've had some temporary staff working on our Access database, and they obviously don't understand names from north of the border very well as the customer table is now cluttered with names such as McAndrew rather than McAndrew. My boss wants me to create an automated routine that puts this right.

I need to change the third character of names starting "Mc..." to upper case. I've pointed out that this may well cause problems for names that shouldn't be capitalised, but the boss is the boss.

Can I run an Update query to make the changes?

Chris Morton

A First, some cautionary advice. Make sure you back up the database before you start, and run any query as a Select query first so that you can see exactly which records you'll be changing. Print out the results of the Select query for safekeeping. That way, you can scan through the list of

changed names, and if any of the changes are incorrect, you can change them back.

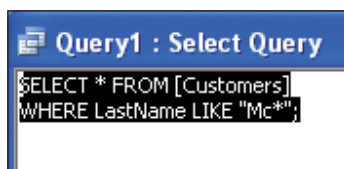
Start with a Select query. If your customer names are stored in a table called Customers, and the last name column is called LastName, you'd use:

```
SELECT * FROM [Customers]
WHERE LastName LIKE "Mc*";
```

This lets you see which records you're messing with. If you're happy to update all these records, you can do so quickly with the Update query:

```
UPDATE [Customers]
SET LastName = "Mc" &
StrConv(Mid([LastName],
3), 3)
WHERE LastName LIKE "Mc*";
```

StrConv is an Access function that converts the case of a string. You can find a full explanation of how it's used at <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/298607>. **KE**



▲ Run a Select query before making changes using an Update query

YOUR EXPERTS

Contact Software Help for software advice and answers

Kay Ewbank

Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



Ben Pitt

Professional musician and keen photographer Ben Pitt gives advice on using creative software.



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How do I get my accents back?

Q I have been using an American keyboard for a long time because it supports 'dead keys', an intuitive way of entering the accents found on international characters.

Now I use a PC that has a UK keyboard. I would like to enter international characters in the same way on this keyboard. However, when I do, the @ key and the " keys on the keyboard swap places. I have to remember to use the opposite key to the one indicated.

How can I configure my UK keyboard so that it's easy to enter words such as my daughter's name, Rú'yá, without remapping other symbols.

Erald Martin

A I think you may be trying to use the United States International keyboard driver with a UK keyboard. This driver supports dead keys (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_key) but it also positions the " character above the ' and the @ character above the 2 character, which isn't where they're printed on your UK keyboard.

The solution is to use the UK Extended driver. To do this in Windows XP, you use Control Panel's Regional and Language Options. In the dialog, select Languages, then Details. The Text Services and Input Languages dialog box appears. Under Installed services, click Add, then click on English (United Kingdom), then in the Keyboard layout/IME list, click United Kingdom Extended, then click OK.

To do the same thing in Vista, you start from the Control Panel's Clock, Language and

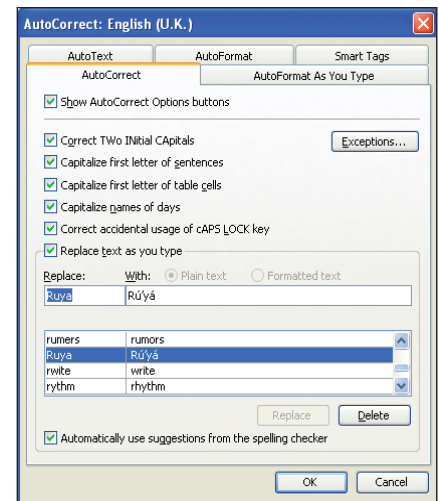
Region, and select Change keyboards or other input methods. Click Change keyboards, and click Add to add a new keyboard layout. You'll see the English (United Kingdom) option. Click the Show More option, and you should see United Kingdom Extended as the next choice.

Once the UK Extended keyboard layout is active, the " and @ keys will be in their correct places, and you will enjoy various new ways to type international characters.

To see the extra characters that the UK Extended keyboard layout provides, visit <http://www.microsoft.com/globaldev/keyboards/kbdukx.htm>. Hover the mouse pointer over the AltGr shift key to see most of the international extensions. The orange keys are the dead keys. Pressing one of these before another letter adds an accent to that letter.

If you want to go further, you can create your own customised keyboard layout using a utility called the Microsoft Keyboard Layout Creator (<http://www.microsoft.com/globaldev/tools/msklc.msp>). With this you can put your most frequently used foreign characters on any key or Shifted key you choose. Essentially, the utility displays an empty keyboard layout, and you can choose what will happen when you press a particular key or key combination. Start from one of the standard keyboard layouts to save you having to define all the keys. Once you've designed your keyboard, you can add it to the list of standard keyboards on offer in Windows.

If you're using Office 2003 or later, another easy solution is to download an add-on for Office called the International Character Toolbar. Search for this at download.microsoft.com.



▲ You can define words using international characters with Word's AutoCorrect facility

The toolbar provides one-click access to international characters. You can use characters from multiple languages at the same time, and you can even create your own custom toolbars with your favourite characters.

If there's a word that you're likely to use frequently, it's probably worth adding it as an Office AutoCorrect entry. You can set up Word so that whenever you type Ruya, for example, it is automatically changed to Rú'yá. This is fairly simple to do. In the Tools menu, choose AutoCorrect options. In that dialog, select the AutoCorrect tab. In the Replace box, type Ruya, and in the With box, type Rú'yá. **KE**

Which place is best for data validation?

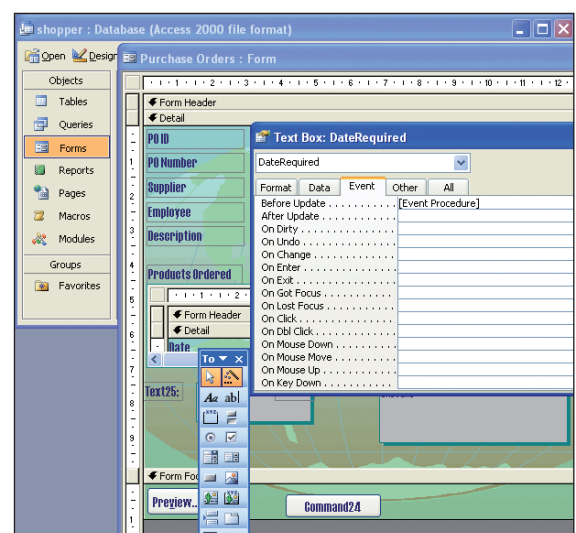
✉ In issue 232 you helped a reader who wanted to check records with multiple validation rules before committing them to an Access database (*Software Help, Shopper June 2007*). You suggested attaching the validation code to the Before_Update event, essentially running the rules just before the data is written to the record on disk. I find it better to attach the checks to each individual control on the form. Each control can have an Event Procedure attached to any one of its many events to give you greater control. By handling the events AfterUpdate, GotFocus, LostFocus and so on, you can check the values once the user has made a change, moved off the control or whatever.

The other thing missing from the form you suggested is a button to close it. Here an Event Procedure would be written to check whether any required fields were missing, and abort the close if a field was null. Ideally, this would show an error message and set the focus on the offending field ready for input. The same code would also look at the reader's 'payment method' field and check for a credit card number and security number.

Glen Sibley

A In some cases, having individual event handlers for controls is indeed preferable. It's worth bearing in mind that you have the choice, and the skill lies in deciding where the checks make most sense for your application. There will be times when it's better to do as you suggest, and to check what value a user has left as soon as they move away from a control. However, this won't always be the case. One way to decide on the best course is to consider what you prefer when you're filling in forms.

Imagine you're filling in a payment details form; you've selected Credit Card as the payment type and moved to the Card Number control, but then you decide you'd rather use PayPal. If there's a check on the Card Number control that says "If payment type is Credit Card, don't let the user leave this control without entering a Card Number", the user is put in the frustrating situation of having to enter a card number before they can go back and choose PayPal instead. Having the validation check on



▲ You can attach validation rules to individual controls, or to the Before_Update event

the Before Update event does away with the nagging and false alarms, but it also means that the user might enter a lot of data before finding out that they can't proceed with the order because their card number isn't recognised, say. It's a matter of design choice. **KE**

Charting Excel data on several sheets

Q I am an experienced Microsoft Excel user, but I have encountered a problem with charts. I need to create a chart based on data that spans several sheets in the same Excel workbook. As a basic example, I might need to create a chart of the data in cell A1 of sheets 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Excel seems to insist on sourcing chart data only from the same sheet. Clearly, I could solve the problem by copying the A1 cells from each sheet into column A of a new sheet, and then constructing the chart from this new sheet, but is this really necessary? Am I missing something? Even the help file doesn't get me any nearer to solving the problem.

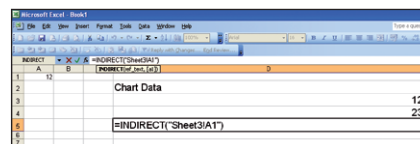
John Bradshaw

A Surprisingly, Excel offers no easy way to do this. I have found two somewhat unsatisfactory solutions, but neither of them is as simple as it should be.

First, you can create a chart with a separate series for each of the data values on the separate sheets. Create a chart with a single series, referring to cell A1 on sheet 1. Next, edit the source data by selecting the chart, right-clicking on it and choosing Source Data. Go to the Series tab and add cell A1 from each of the other sheets as a separate series. You can type the range references in the Values box in the format =Sheet2!\$A\$1, or click the cells you want.

The only other way I know to chart values from multiple sheets is either to copy and paste the values or to use the Indirect function.

To use the Indirect function, you need some blank cells on the sheet where you want the



▲ To show values from multiple sheets on a chart in Excel, you can use the Indirect function

chart to appear. Assuming your data is in cell A1 on the various sheets, you enter the following formulae into a column of cells:

```
=Indirect("Sheet1!A1")
=Indirect("Sheet2!A1")
=Indirect("Sheet3!A1")
...and so on
```

You can then use this range as the basis of your chart. **KE**

How do I play my Flash videos?

Q I recently bought Adobe Premiere Elements 3, partly for its ability to export in Flash Video format, which I'm told is a good choice for incorporating video into websites. I've managed to generate Flash Video files but I can't find any way of integrating them with my website using Dreamweaver MX, and I can't even find any playback software that can play the files on my PC.

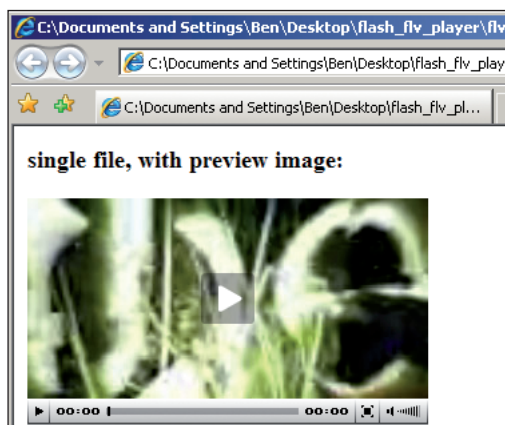
D Higgins

A Flash Video is an excellent choice for web-based video, partly because it offers high quality with small file sizes, but also because a large number of Windows, Mac and Linux-based PCs have the Flash plug-in installed. The only complication – as you've discovered – is that the Flash plug-in doesn't know what to do with a raw Flash Video file (with a .flv extension). Instead, you need to wrap the video file in a conventional Flash Movie file (with a .swf extension), which you then place inside a normal web page. Note that 'Flash Movie' is the generic name for an object created in Flash, and isn't necessarily a movie in the filmic sense of the word.

You'll need a copy of Adobe Flash (formerly Macromedia Flash) to create your Flash Movie from scratch – and specifically version 8 or later to take advantage of the higher-quality video encoding in that version. However, if you don't own a copy of Flash, you can download a ready-made Flash Movie that plays .flv video files. Some of these video players cost money, but many are free for non-commercial use, including an excellent example at www.jeroenwijering.com. It can play both Flash Video and MP3 files, and allows you to create playlists, customise colours, choose a preview image and jump to full-screen playback. You can access all its settings through the accompanying HTML file and (optionally) an XML playlist file, so there's no reason to edit the main SWF Flash Movie file.

Visit www.jeroenwijering.com and follow the links to download the Flash FLV Player. Extract the contents of the Zip-compressed folder into a normal folder. The key files here are the example video, video.flv (which you can replace with your own), the Flash Movie, flvplayer.swf, and the webpage that hosts the Flash Movie, flvplayer.html. You also need the JavaScript file swfobject.js, which gets rid of the annoying Click to Activate message that modern browsers display for Flash Movies. If you want to make various different videos (or MP3s) available as a playlist, you can achieve this with the playlist.xml file. Preview.jpg is the image that appears in the video window before you press play.

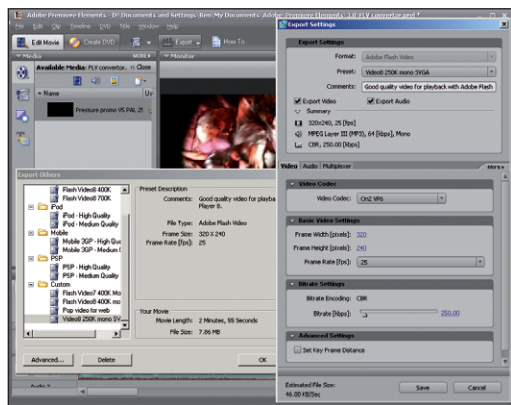
Jeroen Wijering's Flash Video Player comes with extensive scope for customisation – see the Readme file for details. However, if you just want to get it up and running quickly, import your .flv video into the same folder as the files above, then open flvplayer.html in your HTML editor or Notepad. You'll see code to display two players,



▲ Jeroen Wijering's Flash Video Player lets you incorporate streaming Flash Videos and MP3s into your website

one with and one without a playlist (open the file in your web browser to see for yourself). Assuming you don't want the playlist version, delete the lower of the two long paragraphs of code. You may also want to delete or change the titles (preceded by <h3>) and the link at the bottom. Point the player to your video file by changing the reference to video.flv to your own .flv filename. Similarly, change the preview.jpg image reference to your own JPEG file. Resize the player window by changing the values 300 and 170 in the line that begins var s1 =. The most obvious dimensions to use are those of your Flash Video file (as set in Premiere Elements' export options), plus 20 pixels extra height for the control bar. However, you may want to enlarge it, especially as the Flash plug-in is good at up-scaling video without it looking too blocky.

Finally, you'll probably want to incorporate the video player into a page on your website. Do this by pasting the script straight into your page, but remember to include the line that links to the Javascript file in the page's header, too. You'll also need to copy all the files mentioned above into the same folder that contains your new HTML file – or alter the links to each file following the usual rules of HTML. **BP**



▲ Premiere Elements 3 includes templates for exporting in Flash Video format



Custom slide numbering in PowerPoint

Q I want to add slide numbers to some slides in a PowerPoint presentation. Is it possible to choose which slide the numbering starts on, and which number it starts with?

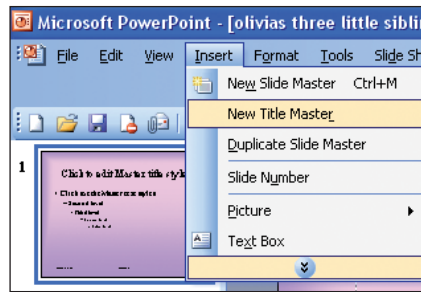
J Wright

A PowerPoint offers several options for numbering slides. You can choose which number you want the slide numbering to start with by going to File, Page Setup, Number slides from. You can set this option to any value from 0 upwards.

Numbering just some of your slides requires some trickery, and the neatest way is to use a Slide Master and a Title Master. For your slides without numbers at the beginning, use a Title Master with no numbers; for the rest of the slides, use a Slide Master with slide numbers.

The first step is to define a Title Master. From the View menu, choose Master, Slide Master. This will show you the current Slide Master you're using. From the Insert menu, choose Title Master.

By default, Slide Masters have an area in the footer called Number Area. On the Title Master, which you are going to use for the opening



▲ Use a Title Master to skip slide numbering in Microsoft PowerPoint

slides with no numbering, select the Number Area placeholder and delete it.

Go back to the Normal view, select the slides you want to show without slide numbers, and specify that they are title slides. Next, from the File menu, choose Page Setup, Number slides from, and give the opening slide a value that will give the correct number when you get to the first non-title slide. If you have three title slides, say, and want your fourth slide to be numbered slide 7, you'd Number slides from 4. If you want the fourth slide numbered slide 3, you'd Number slides from 0. However, you hit a problem if you

want to number the fourth slide 2 or less, as you can't start numbering from a negative number.

For more flexible control over slide numbers, use a macro rather than PowerPoint's auto-numbering. Take the slide numbers off the master slides and run the macro below. **KE**

```
Sub Numberme()  
    StartFrom = CInt(InputBox("Start  
    numbering from which slide?"))  
    SlideNum = CInt(InputBox("What  
    number should this slide have?"))  
  
    NumSlides = ActivePresentation.  
        Slides.Count  
  
    For i = StartFrom To NumSlides  
        With ActivePresentation.  
            Slides(i).Shapes.AddTextbox(Type  
            e:=msoTextOrientationHorizontal,  
            Left:=500, Top:=500, Height:=50)  
            .TextFrame.TextRange.Text =  
                CStr(SlideNum)  
            SlideNum = SlideNum + 1  
        End With  
    Next  
End Sub
```

Tracking record creator and creation date

Q I want my Access database to make a note of the date on which each record was created, and who created it. How do I do this?

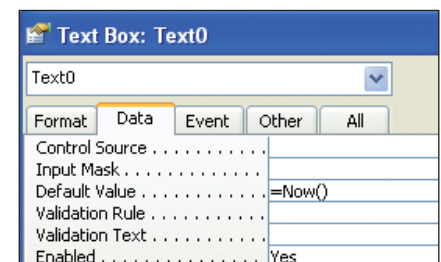
H Patel

A Noting the date on which a record was created is pretty straightforward – you add a date/time field called Created to your table, and give it a Default Value property of =Now().

Recording the username is also easy provided your users sign in to your database with a username and password. To implement this, use the User Level Security Wizard on the Tools, Security menu. This creates two default levels of user: administrators (who can do

everything to the database) and users (who by default can do nothing). Assuming you don't need to give different types of users different levels of access, the corresponding default Admins and Users groups are all you need. You must assign the appropriate permissions to the default Users group. Typical permissions might include Read Data and Update Data for tables and queries, and Open/Run for forms and reports.

Once you've created the security settings, everyone who attempts to open the database will have to enter a username and password. The wizard creates a backup of the old, unsecured database, so when you're happy that your usernames and passwords are working correctly, you should delete the unsecured copy or make it unavailable in some other way.



▲ Use =Now() to make a note of record creation dates automatically

Once all users are signing into your database you can record who creates records easily. Just add a text field called User to your table and set its Default Value property to CurrentUser(). **KE**

Stop Word's macro nag

Q I use a BBC scriptwriting tool called Script Smart. Essentially, it's a set of templates for Microsoft Word. Every time I open one of my files it asks me if I want to enable macros. To use the file with Script Smart's added formatting I have to answer 'yes' twice when prompted.

This is time-consuming and irritating. How can I set it so that all the documents I save using Script Smart automatically enable macros when I re-open them?

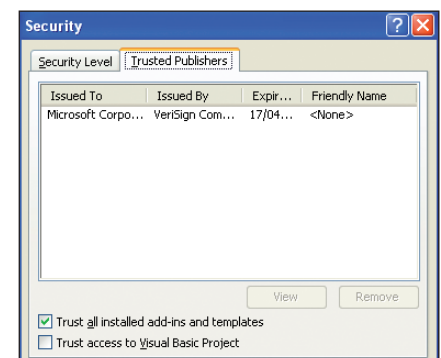
I've heard that there is a 'trusted list' but can't find out how to add all my Script Smart documents to this list.

Michael Beck

A The Script Smart Word templates contain built-in macros that cause this annoying nagging message.

To prevent Word asking you whether to run the macros, you need to set your copy of Word to trust all installed templates and add-ins. If you're using one of the more recent versions of Word, you can do this from the Tools, Macro, Security menu. On the Trusted Publishers tab, tick the option to "Trust all installed add-ins and templates". This should ensure that the macros run without prompting.

If you continue to experience problems with add-ins when this option is enabled, it could be that the add-in has been installed in the Office



▲ Make sure you've set Word to trust all installed add-ins and templates

Startup folder. In this case, try moving the add-in to Word's own Startup folder instead. **KE**